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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to tell and untell five stories about the notion of "policy hysteria." The first story, about developments in vocationalism in the United Kingdom over the last decade, serves as illustration for the second story, which is a critical analysis of vocationalist discourse. It is alleged that vocationalist discourse is made irrational by a whole series of shifts and displacements in meaning and activity, amounting to a condition of "policy hysteria." The third story picks up and picks apart the central notion of time that is implicit in both vocationalist discourse and in its analysis in the second story. Identifying a modernist collusion between the second and third stories, the fourth story attempts a more radical deconstruction of metaphors of "movement" in time and space that underpin "policy hysteria" as a concept, and offers an account of the phenomenon that does not depend on an overt or covert foundationalism--unlike the previous stories. The last tale is more of a riddle than a narrative: it is the question of how to render a deconstructive account. Contains 29 references. (Author/LMI)

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Deconstructing the notion of "policy hysteria": five readings, some unprincipled coupling, and no happy endings

'Healed the abyss
of torpid instinct and trifling flux
Laundered it, lighted it, made it lovable with
cathedrals and theories'
(Auden)

The purpose of this paper is to tell and untell five stories about the notion of "policy hysteria". The first story, about developments in vocationalism in the UK over the last decade or so, will go largely untold, except as illustration to the second story, which is a critical analysis of vocationalist discourse. It will allege that vocationalist discourse is made irrational by a whole series of shifts and displacements in meaning and activity, amounting to a condition of "policy hysteria". The third story will pick up, and pick apart, the central notion of time that is implicit in both vocationalist discourse and in its analysis in the second story. Having identified a modernist collusion between these two latter stories, the fourth story will attempt a more radical deconstruction of metaphors of "movement" in time and space that underpin "policy hysteria" as a concept, and offer an account of the phenomenon that does not depend on an overt or covert foundationalism - unlike the previous stories. The last tale is more of a riddle than a narrative: it is the question of how to think these sorts of 'storying' and 'unstorying' together - to render a deconstructive account.

First, why pick on vocationalism? Deconstructionists are fond of analysing single events or objects - the ill-fated flight KAL 007, (Falk 1988), the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles (Jameson 1984), Silk cut cigarette advertising (Linstead and Grafton-Small 1990), a 'High Noon'/Cary Grant 'Solidarity' poster in the 1989 Polish election (Wernick 1991), and so on. There is a tendency for contemporary, individual artefacts and events to receive a kind of long-range pounding from postmodern theory. On the one hand, there are the abstract and periodizing features of the analysis - notions of temporality, or spatiality, or referentiality. On the other hand, we are presented with a perplexing and exotic collection of objects as subjects for thought - the missing flight box of a plane and the consequent speculation about causes of the crash, Christo's silk curtain and its redeployment as an aid to encouraging people to smoke, Gary Cooper armed with a ballot paper and leading the Polish people's democratic march on their Communist masters, and so on. The interpretive technique is for the former generalities to define the latter specifics. Each object 'expresses' postmodernist features. It seems odd, however, to claim that the eclectic and self-referential flux of 'post modernism' can be defined in such a way, with objects representing in microcosmic form the paradigm/period to which they belong (definitive proof in an indefinite age) - allowing the substantive claim to postmodernism to be traduced by a covert interpretive return to structuralism. (It is true that ways of life may be deduced by the contents of trash cans, but only if the occupant is a modernist. And what if history itself is in the trash can?)

1. It can be regarded as a 'space' rather than an object. We mean that notion in the sense employed by Donzelot: a 'relational technology' linking different institutions (Donzelot 1980).

2. It is part of a discursive formation. That formation connects education to the future of the capitalist economy, and so reflects a central ideological concern of the state in late capitalism/disorganized capitalism. As Wilding points out in his review of social policy in the UK, numerous discrete policy areas (eg health, social security) are now also becoming more integrated with economic policy issues (Wilding 1993) - both in terms of rationales, and management procedures.

3. It has the characteristics of a dynamic rather than a static entity. In this sense we wish to depart from the more static analyses of modernity that Foucault and Donzelot offer.

4. The discourse is subject to a multiple series of 'translations' between ideology, policy, programme, and practice. These 'translations' are effected through processes of professional and managerial redefinition that exist in other spheres of public service, like social work:

> '..notions of management frame and supplant the central activities of the professionals themselves and the forms of knowledge they draw upon.' (Parton 1994, p26)

In this way, 'political rationalities' and 'governmental technologies' intersect (Rose and Miller 1992, p175), and raise the central problem of what Foucault called 'governmentality'.

As a result, we can replace questions like 'what does this mean?' or 'how does this mean?' with the less defining approach of 'how and under what compulsion do meanings shift?' In so doing, issues of intertextuality are raised.

5. A further incentive for taking seriously the discourse of 'vocationalism' in education is that it is a discourse of crisis - that is, it may be regarded as a characteristic act of 'problematization' by the state (cf also 'youth', 'single parent', 'foreigner', 'scrounger' etc):

> '.. the history of government might well be written as a history of problematization, in which politicians, intellectuals, philosophers, medics, military men, feminists and philanthropists have measured the real against the ideal and found it wanting'. (Rose and Miller 1992, p182)

6. Thus far, these issues represent questions of referentiality and spatiality, but the 'vocational space' also allows us to address the sorts of problems of temporality raised by Falk - like: what relation of past, present and future is projected within the discourse? Or questions of our own such as 'how does the temporal structure of the discourse help determine questions of validity or performativity?'

So what we are proposing is that we should explore the postmodern phenomenon not so much in terms of objects (buildings, advertisements, posters) - postmodernism as style - but rather as 'spaces' where (a) meanings are transformed, (b) processes of meaning-transformation are themselves transformed, (c) notions of postmodern time are constructed, (d) elements of sponsorship and contestation provoke both meaning-making and meaning-shifting. Let's call that postmodernism as movement.

STORY 2: the critical analysis of 'policy hysteria' (an extract)

During recent evaluation work, we developed the notion of 'policy hysteria', and mean the term to refer to a cluster of related features in educational policy development, although we suspect the phenomenon is a more general one. It can be identified by:

- ***shortening cycles of recurrent reforms***
- ***multiple innovation***
- ***frequent policy switches, involving inconsistent aims and means***
- ***scapegoating of systems, professionals, and client groups***
- ***shifting meanings within the central vocabulary of the reform***
- ***rotation of themes of blame and cure***
- ***innovations suffering from endemic credibility problems***
- ***displacing of professional expertise by managerial and centralised control***

To briefly illustrate the emergence of these trends in vocationalist developments in the UK:

1. *Educational change in the 1980s and 1990s in Scotland, and elsewhere, was characterised by **recurring waves of reform**. These developed increasingly short-term patterns, based on 3 to 5 year cycles of development. The policy cycle grew more frenetic, and gave rise to what respondents in the arena of education/business links called **'sunburst' and 'dieback' effects**. Recent work on the legacy of a billion pound project like TVEI[1] also suggests serious 'dieback' effects (Merson 1992; Williams and Yeomans 1993). Cuban noted similar wave-like patterns in the US (Cuban 1990).*

2. ***Multiple innovation** became the norm, with the next set of reforming initiatives overtaking and overlapping the last before their effect was known or knowable. In Scottish schools it was not unusual for secondary schools in 1993 to be doing 13 different kinds of vocationalist activity, as well as other major curriculum and assessment developments. TVEI rationales clashed with Compact; TVEI audit vied with regional efforts in School Development Planning. Things were even more dramatic in England and Wales, where the subject-based National Curriculum threw the skills-based TVEI into either contradiction or hasty post-hoc rationalisation, and where TVEI-based collaboration (eg inter-school consortia) clashed with increased inter-school competition brought about by the Education Reform Act.*

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[1] *Technical and Vocational Education Initiative: a broadly vocationalist programme of educational reform in UK secondary schools.*

3. *These waves of policy changes were often inconsistent and incoherent. The Manpower Services Commission[2] led the charge towards basic skills in 1980, and away again in 1984. The Government supported the 'generic competencies' of TVEI in 1984 and reverted to basic subjects and standards in 1988. Records of Achievement[3] became the hitchhiker of the educational galaxy, forever being picked up and put down in a different place - as a vocational guide, as personal development, as curriculum vitae, as a counselling instrument, as individual action planning. Traditional attitudes were the problem in 1989, and the solution in 1993.*

4. *Reform initiatives became more symbolic in nature, answering a need to legitimise a political 'response', rather than 'solve' an educational problem (Stronach 1989; Kliebard 1990). They offered far too simple versions both of the 'problems' they addressed and the 'solution' they promised. Elements of* ***scapegoating*** *became embedded as policy. As such, reform initiatives were politically important at the beginning, when they needed to be projected within the media as potential 'solutions' (eg TVEI in 1984), and much less important at the end, when they tended to be ignored (eg TVEI in 1993; see also the rise and fall of Compact). As a result the over-simplifications of blaming and curing set up cycles of initiatives designed to respond to crises that were more imagined than real, and so destined to fail.*

   In addition, reforms were politically contested within the education system, interpreted differently at different programme levels (Bates 1989), and developed a language of 'enterprise', 'relevance', 'student-centredness' that came to have as many definitions as it had voices (Williamson 1992; Turner et al 1993). This process was characterised by radical ***shifts in meaning****. The government tended to introduce educational reforms and ideas that were business-oriented and instrumental. 'Relevance' meant the needs of employers: 'enterprise' meant the need to encourage an 'enterprise culture'. But developers and teachers translated such words into more comfortable and familiar definitions:*

   Enterprise: 'Enterprise carries with it no official values; morally it is neutral. Probably the best simple definition is the 'ability to make things happen'. (Warwick 1989)

5. *The speed and overlap of reform waves meant that few of these initiatives could succeed. They were never in uncontested place long enough, often poorly conceived and hastily implemented, imposed on the teaching force, and subject to marketing strategies that provoked cynicism in professional staff. The result was an* ***endemic crisis of legitimation*** *which meant that each 'solution' quickly lost its persuasiveness and had to be replaced by another. In the vocationalist arena, the effect was a kind of* ***rotation*** *of various themes of 'blame' and 'cure' - from basic skills to generic skills to subject excellence and 'back to the basics'.*

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[2] *Government agency charged with training developments.*

[3] *A detailed formative and summative record of pupil experience and achievement.*

6. *These conditions clearly amount to extreme **turbulence** at the policy level, and in relation to curriculum and assessment. By the early 1990s the contents, processes and structures of education were all in a state of flux. That turbulence was aggravated by a series of management ideologies that swept through (or over) the field of professional action. Performance Indicators, Total Quality Management, School Effectiveness, School Improvement, BS5750, all jostled with curriculum reforms in an attempt to measure and promote the effectiveness of education, although there was barely an independent variable left in the system.*

   *The intention of these policy and management reforms was to **shift educational debate out of professional arenas**, where it was felt to be a closed and oligarchic discussion, and into the realms of a more 'open' populist debate, led by politicians, right-wing ideologues, and media pundits. Hence the current debates on education's woefully inadequate contribution to the government virtues (not to be confused with personal virtues) of Discipline, Family Values, and the Basics.*

7. *The education system was simultaneously charged with **tremendous but unsubstantiated successes in its specific reforms**, and an underlying but somehow never contradictory demand from politicians for more change and higher standards in the face of competition from foreigners (none of whom were behaving quite like this). Innovations always 'succeeded', and the situation always grew worse.*

   *That is the nature and some of the consequences, then, of **'policy hysteria'** in the vocationalist field, and in education more generally. It involves a flux of successive and evanescent reforms, designed to construct short-term political support for current policies that address reflections and deflections of the real problems society faces. On current showing, it begins in tragedy and ends in farce (as Marx once said). We assume that it is caused by a politically necessary displacement of economic problems into the education system, more or less as Habermas suggested (Habermas 1976). But such 'structural' explanation should not obscure the contribution of a kind of weak-minded populism (present in the educational policies of more than one political party in the UK) since it is hard to see anything strategic, or even in the medium term mildly plausible, about such a mad soup of activity. In the vocationalist field at least, it is a characteristic of capitalist countries such as the UK, Australia, and the USA, as they react to perceptions of economic decline: bring on the scapegoats! There is also evidence that other policy areas show similar developments. Ham has recently enumerated five rather different orientations of the current UK government to health service reforms (Ham 1994), while Parton indicates similar sorts of shifts in the management and control of social work (Parton 1994).*

Finally, we may note that the social phenomenon of 'policy hysteria' has its consequences for the individual: the over-worked, insecure, and sometimes paranoid professional. The question is, of course: do we mean the participants in this frantic scene, or the observers of it?

STORY 3: a brief history of time

In this story, we want to examine the notion of time as it is expressed or implied in vocationalist discourse. We hope to show how postmodern temporality has erased the 'present', leaving us with one foot in a heritage view of the past and the other in an unpredictable but still predicted future, so that the vocationalist 'presence' becomes a moment in an empty dialectic between a future that may never be and a past that never was.

A sweeping claim. Let us try to sketch a justification. Within vocationalist discourse, we can identify three different notions of temporality. Generally speaking, proponents within the discourse see time as a linear kind of 'progress-thinking' (Falk 1988). There are two versions of this progression. The first links an education system that is conceived as 'backward' with changes designed to meet current employer 'needs'. The second links the education system with some version of the future needs of post-industrialism - usually invoking so-called generic competences such as problem-solving, team-working, interpersonal skills etc. The clock of this kind of 'time' is capitalist development, and especially the increasing international competition that puts the wealth and dominance of established capitalist economies at some risk (the UK, Australia and the US worry about this more than most).

A second kind of time is cyclical rather than linear. It envisages a return to lost individualist virtues such as those represented in the work ethic, or personal qualities such as honesty, morality, thrift etc. It posits time as a circular return to past virtues (historical or mythic) and a projection of those virtues into the future. In a way, it is a kind of reduction of time to the notion of space, as Falk points out in a more general context: the present becomes the place where the eternal verities are re-enacted and restored.

The contrast between these two versions of vocationalist time is vividly seen in the different responses, for example, of the expanding and modernising state of Malaysia, and that of the UK. Malaysia celebrates the future in a "Vision 20/20" drive, while Major's 'Back to Basics' campaign is accompanied by invocations of warm beer, cricket and old ladies cycling to church in the early morning mist (Vision 1920).

In general, we can argue that in the case of the UK the notion of 'linear' time is deconstructed via the idea of 'cyclical' time (the circle is the unacknowledged 'other' of the line); a reading which also implicates the notions of modern/archaic, rational/irrational, and past/present.

The third notion of time is Falk's "catastrophic future time" (Falk 1988). Falk discusses the notion of "catastrophic future time" in relation to the shooting down of Korean Airline flight 007. He makes a number of interesting points. First, he shows how the event is written from the basis of a future event - possible or imminent nuclear war. Both sides 'story' the event from the point of view of the Cold War. As Falk points out the 'present' is determined by a future event which is both a non-event (it has not happened and may not happen) and also a 'super-event' (Falk 1988, p389) in that it colours all accounts surrounding the incident, including the blurring of fact with fiction, film and fantasy. Second, he argues that the speed of the 'event' and its instantaneous narrative reporting reflect the accelerating ability of media to compose and explain stories so that the space in which historical investigation might have

taken place is covered over. The story is the meaning of the event (see also Bruck 1992). In the end the 'truth' of what happened becomes a performative matter, in Lyotard's terms - a matter for the most successful projection of the story at any given moment. And also, we might add, a matter of flux - endlessly open to different storying within the broad determination of the envisaged future catastrophe (cf the cultural industry surrounding the assassination of Kennedy or Martin Luther King, or the continuing 'life' of Elvis). Finally, Falk concludes that events have become self-explanatory spectacles, and that History has become a casualty of the present/future - we now live by 'futurostorical' accounts (Falk 1988, p388).

There are interesting parallels in vocationalist discourse. It is certainly the case that in the UK vocationalism is written around and against a potentially catastrophic future. The 'crisis' is acute, the metaphor medical - 'ailing economy', 'sick man' of Europe, the daily stock market report as the patient's 'temperature' and so on. Economic decline is a "super-event", although of course it is also a non-event in absolute terms. This oppressive sense of future time has rewritten educational futures in the language of competition, productivity and competence, dumping the old Grand Narratives of educational philosophy as a justification for educational activity. At the same time, 'past time' has contributed to the erasure of present time by the cyclical notions of blame and cure, through the effects of scapegoating and moral panics. Attacked on two fronts (past and future) the present seems to have given up the ghost.

Falk's concern was that History itself was squeezed out by such 'future thinking'. Our analysis of vocationalist time would see that squeeze as double-sided, a deception based on nostalgia as well as nightmare, and possibly helping to explain why interest in defining or researching the 'present' is given such low priority. (For example, there have been no research attempts to test the educational or economic outcomes of 'vocationalist' initiatives in the UK). Perhaps research - like History - is a casualty of this constellation of 'time'.

If we now step back from this story of 'time', we can perhaps conclude that we have a richer understanding of how temporality is played out in vocationalist discourse, and what the consequences may be for the 'present'. But such an interpretation has a cost: it too contains a nostalgia, silently reinserting a world that knew its past, acknowledged the realities of the present, and planned soberly for the future. We might conclude that the story acts as a mythic cleansing of the fantasies and errors projected into the discourse's notion of 'past' and 'future'. Our critique re-enacts the mythic recovery it decries in the discourse, and like all modernity it hides the myth that acts as a foundation to its interpretation (Fitzpatrick 1992).

It seems we must continue the deconstruction.

STORY 4: deconstructing 'policy hysteria': time for a hysterectomy?

The notion of 'policy hysteria' collects together a range of phenomena defined in terms of movement in time/space. In trying to re-think vocationalism, not as a static 'ism' but as a constantly changing discursive formation, we tried to depict a space in which different kinds of movement take place. Our aim in developing that notion of 'hysteria' was pragmatic as well as textual: the intention was to make a tactical intervention in the discourses of

vocationalism that would destabilise the certainty of fixed positions, and expose the routine irrationality behind the vaunted rationality of both policy and policy analysis. We also intended to work 'inside' the discourses of vocationalism - to develop an immanent critique that would destabilise these discourses on their 'own' terms.

In this story we deconstruct our own textual practices. We argue that, in trying to capture movement we have inevitably also arrested it; that indeed all the dichotomies that we started out by trying to invert - object/space, stasis/movement, stability/instability, certainty/uncertainty - have reinstated themselves 'behind our backs' as general organising principles of our own arguments. In order to talk about motion we have stopped it in its tracks, like Culler's arrow (1983, p94) which is paradoxically both in flight and, at any given instant, only in one particular spot. Our 'reading' of vocationalism in terms of metaphors of movement (short term cycles; overlapping innovations; policy switches; meaning shifts; displacement of professional expertise; rotation of themes), conceals a pervasive nostalgia, we suggest below, for the opposite of movement and its cognates - for stability, order, certainty, and - as we identified at the end of the last story - the 'present' as reality.

Let us look, then, at some of the individual terms of motion that we have used to construct activity within the vocationalist space.

shortening cycles of recurrent reforms: contains two, slightly different nostalgic appeals. First, the wave-form ascribed to contemporary change entertains the ideal possibility of arresting policy, so that it avoids repeating itself, at least for considerable lengths of time. Second, the description of the cycle as speeding up ('frenetic') contains within it the notion of a departure from 'proper' or orderly speed. And acceleration implies loss of control, crisis, and the potential for future catastrophe, as we saw.

multiple innovation: constructs the vocational space as cluttered and disorderly, with innovations jostling and leapfrogging one another, against an ideal topography where innovations are disposed in a more linear and orderly arrangement.

frequent policy switches: again, contains an implicit pathology of movement, which reads oscillation against stasis, and inconsistency against consistency.

rotation of themes: a cynical reading of movement as irrational. Policy becomes merely an opportunistic carousel of solutions which happen to succeed one another, against an implied ideal condition where a solution is properly and permanently connected to its antecedent analysis or rationale. There is a covert appeal here, not just to the idea of movement as orderly succession, but to cause-and-effect as the basic mechanism of that succession, linking problems with solutions, and also to those 'experts' who know how to connect the latter to the former.

scapegoating: as one of the phenomena that causes oscillations between false blame and baseless cure, this notion too is invested with the nostalgia for 'rational movement' described above.

shifting meanings within the central vocabulary of the reform: again, invoking a pathology of movement - in this case, of meanings - within the discursive space. There is a clear

nostalgia here for a lost condition of stability of meaning - for a time when words were securely and singly connected with 'their' meanings; or, at least, where the instability of meaning was much less 'radical'.

displacing of professional discretion by managerial and centralised control: implies a kind of ideological invasion of the discursive space (ie by the forces of centralisation) that again disrupts a 'proper' disposition of elements, or overruns protected areas of operation within the overall space.

The same might be said of other terms used in our critical analysis, such as flux, or turbulence. But the line of argument is clear: at every instant of trying to talk of movement, we have simultaneously whispered about order, propriety, normality, stability. Our stories of shift, displacement and rotation contain repressed fantasies of devices for keeping things in place and curbing excess. We have constructed, in other words, a full-blown 'metaphysics of presence' - the characteristic turn of Western thinking/philosophising, according to Derrida, in which analysis becomes:

> the enterprise of returning "strategically", in idealization, to an origin or to a "priority" seen as simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order then to conceive of [...] derivation, complication, deterioration, accident etc. [Limited inc, p236; original emphasis].

In our critical analysis of vocationalism, we collected together all the movements that we discerned in the vocationalist space under the name of 'policy hysteria'. This term seems, on reflection (or rather, on deconstruction), more apt than we knew at the time, for it contains within it virtually all the dichotomies of presence/absence noted above. 'Hysteria' is the negative 'other' in a whole range of dichotomies: it stands for disorder, instability, abnormality, unpredictability, excess, sickness, unreason. Its etymology and its significance within Freudian psychoanalysis allows it to be read, further, in gendered terms - as the disorderly female principle that challenges male rationality and control.

'Hysteria', then, is underwritten by the metaphysics of presence: it reads the contemporary policy scene, or space, as an aberration from an ideal condition of health, normality, and reason. Yet the initial analysis of vocationalism was undertaken to point to the impossibility of such static and essentialist aspirations, on the part of a postmodern critique. We were convinced by Derrida's argument that the search for 'presence' - for those principles or entities that will ground theory and end uncertainty - is always, endlessly deferred. Whatever is proposed as the first, last or fundamental thing always turns out to be itself dependent on something else: 'a product, dependent or derived in ways that deprive it of the authority of simple or pure presence' (Culler, 1983: 94).

How, then, to rescue ourselves from the dichotomising and foundational logic that turns out to have organised our argument against dichotomies? How to read motion without, at the same time, freezing it? One way to do this would be to deconstruct the logic of exclusion that has allowed us to read hysteria as sick movement - as an aberrant derivative of 'healthy' movement.

STORY 5: no heroes, no goodies and baddies, and no happy endings either

Let us try to spell out what kind of story we want this final one to be. First, we are not looking for a definitive account, having rejected that possibility. Second, we want the account to make no appeal to an explicit or implicit foundational state of recovery. Third, we would like to avoid the privileging of one or other aspect of a dichotomizing analysis. Finally, we don't want this story to dismiss the others, but rather to augment our understanding of a potentially infinite series of possible stories about vocationalism. Deconstruction divides, but only in order to multiply the stories that we can tell.

A suitable metaphor within which to think about changes of meaning over time - which we have already used - is 'freeze'/'unfreeze'. It is clear how it may apply to 'movement' and we have already deployed it in that sense. But it also may apply to movements in time. Cyclical time, Falk argues, is not time at all - time frozen in the re-enactment of the verities. Catastrophic time might also be so regarded - an apparently immutable future determining readings of the present. So time can freeze the present.

But how do we address vocationalist discourse, and the thinking of such discourses, with such a couplet - and without privileging one or other of the terms? And how do we represent the postmodernist flux of these discourses without again resorting to some foundationalist notion of order and certainty?

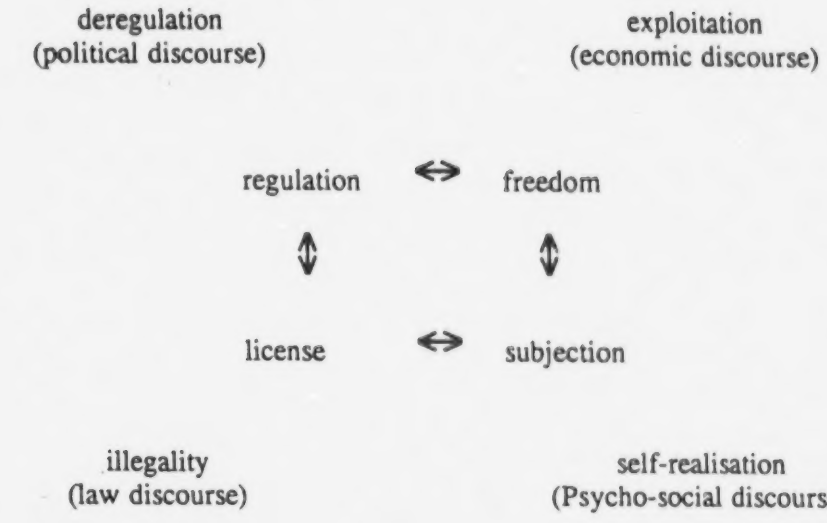
A good place to start thinking about that might be to ask what kind of ordering and disordering principles apply to such discourses. We certainly want to avoid the kinds of totalizing and 'freezing' metaphor that Foucault employs - surveillance, gaze. They are metaphors for the modernist condition, and they stand on some unexplicated vantage-point that Foucault never really articulates. But the notion of 'regulated freedom' has more appeal (Rose and Miller 1992, p174). It is less determined. It is paradoxical, if not ironic. It juxtaposes a condition of 'unfreezing' (freedom) with a qualification of 'freezing' (regulation):

1. regulation 2. freedom

We might also set up these terms against another deconstructing possibility, and consider that cluster of terms as a suitable subject for decontruction, taking into account the 12 variations they offer, and acknowledging that such a cluster would be one of many possibilities, and is not autonomous, having deconstructive links with other terms and discourses:

3. license 4. subjection

The cluster would now look like this:



Why these terms? The choice is not a necessary one, but may nevertheless be sufficient: these are common critical concepts in contemporary analyses of the relationships between power and knowledge. It may be possible to identify how their various couplings are represented in vocationalist discourse - and we do want, in the end, to return from this theoretical expedition with something that relates to the task of criticising specific educational or social programmes.

At any rate, we can in principle examine many different sorts of deconstructive pairing in this constellation. 'Regulated freedom', for instance, is a contradiction - the rule-bound, imposed constraints placed on unruly freedom. Like most of these possible combinations, it needs to be read ironically to give it a post-structuralist turn. 'Licensed unfreedom' on the other hand, might better express the play of structure and agency in a 'deregulated' world ruled by accounting procedures, and controlled through categorical funding. We do not wish to spell out all the possible combinations at this stage, nor to examine how these characterisations of structure and agency link into other discourses - although we can't doubt that these links are powerful. The main points that we want to make here are as follows:

1. These concepts stand in a series of possible deconstructive relationships. As concepts they point 'inwards': they do not define themselves by reference to external and absolute criteria of 'freedom' (eg Habermas) or to 'subjection' (Foucault). They take their meaning in combination with other terms. There is no foundational appeal. They have a "site" but not a "ground" (Shurmann 1993, p42).

2. They are forms of movement/stasis, structure/agency that can be employed to characterise objects and relations within (for example) vocationalist discourse, and to express shifts in meaning:

   - regulated freedom (school holidays)
   - licensed subjection (Records of Achievement)
   - licensed freedom (Work Experience)
   - regulated subjection (didactic pedagogy)

3. They allow us to think in terms of inherent (rather than aberrant) movement within the discourse (neither order nor hysteria), because they carry out a series of translations within and between discourses, grafting different combinations of power and knowledge into temporary structures of application. An example might be the case of Records of Achievement, which has turned up in many different ideological forms and rationales - from licensed freedom (open recording within the insistence to record) to regulated subjection (compulsory, supervisor-assessed, pre-ordained categories and scales, atomised performances). Again, we first reported this circumstance as an aberration (why don't they make their minds up?) but it might be more useful to see those shifts centrally as a condition of movement - rather than a pathological case.

   This does seem to connect better with recent vocationalist developments because what has been striking about innovation within the vocationalist discourse over the last decade or so is just that mutability of the meaning of reforms, initiatives, pedagogues, and the ways in which their meanings seem to fluctuate.

   Thus the manifestation of discursive 'movement', hitherto characterised as an aberration in the critical analysis offered earlier - exiled as 'hysteria' - is now domesticated again. The condition of the vocationalist discourse is 'disordered', but not in a sense that permits the nostalgic recovery of 'order'.

4. Such characterisation of discourse in terms of movement and translation takes us away from the 'regimes of truth' and towards more fluid notions of how power and knowledge are generated and deployed in the moments of their translation. This discursive formation fragments into a shifting economy of signifies. The notion of 'governmentality' loses its totalizing and over-determined grasp, while still retaining an ability to read and 'make up' the individual in terms of the economy:

   'Governmentality is predicated upon a kind of knowledge of the individual that is both individual and capable of reference to some totality [...] such as 'population', the 'nation', or the 'economy' (Robson 1993, p464).

5. What kind of erasure is involved in these situations? Our first erasure saw policy's mask obscuring hysteria, but what that critical analysis hid from view was its own assumptions of a mythic return to a calm and rational existence. We could say that this was a story of modernity's myths exposed yet re-affirmed - confusion revealed as chaos, then recovered from disorder in a way that masked a mythic concern for cosmos. Fitzgerald's analysis of contemporary law points to the prevalence of such 'recoveries': myth and modernity are not opposites, but modern myth is the denial of myth (Fitzpatrick 1992).

But there is more to be said, because it is not enough to unmask modernity with a superior version of reality. That unmasking must locate itself within rather than beyond - a postmodern condition. We have suggested one way in which that might be attempted. Now we need to acknowledge a cost of so doing. Notions of 'freedom', as we saw, can no longer stand above the fray - they become compromised absolutes, they cannot avoid deconstructive qualification - although of course we may continue to invoke them.

They then have a rhetorical meaning that they cannot realise in the deconstructive flux of discursive living. They are cast adrift. But it is not 'freedom' that is erased in these new circumstances - it is the notion of what will count as subjection that becomes problematic, and it is for this reason that the 'evaluation' of educational or other social initiatives has become so problematic. It is evident from the shifts and somersaults of the interpreting professions that it is becoming harder to tell Left from Right or to assign objects in the discourse a political value. The simplicity of the totalizing 'regime' is giving way (perhaps) to more complex and fluid forms of control, although this implies no liberalisation of political intention. Labels, once called concepts, empty and fill with semantic ingenuity. Power becomes a maze of uncertain pressures and knowledges. Metaphors of force seem more useful than metaphors of foundation, but that force is largely an ambivalent exercise of influence, and we wouldn't want to imply any great strategic or omniscient quality to its exercise, seeing it more as a conglomeration of tactics rather than a Plan. In the arena we have been examining, it is a form of governmentality that operates through the principle of seduction far more than the principle of repression, but, in this culture at least, that does not mean that a 'maze' cannot also be a 'prison'.

We have told 5 stories about vocationalism and 'policy hysteria', each story unsettling the previous, and the last one pointing to the need to deconstruct the translations and grafts produced in a fluid and ungrounded discursive formation, one in which concepts make sense not definitionally but in deconstructing association with each other. In the end, and regretfully, we find no happy ending because it is a story that refuses the nostalgia of recovery, that fails to translate readily into emancipatory political action, and which casts adrift founding ideals like progress and even freedom.

Conjured no more
By his master music to wed
Their truths to times, the Eternal Objects
Drift about in a daze
(Auden)

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